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RUSSIAN COMPOSERS AS DESCRIBED BY THEMSELVES

By JULIEN TIERSOT

RUSSIAN music to-day is well known throughout the civilized world. The latest arrival among the schools of tonal art, for half a century or more she has given proofs of an activity and a vitality which have brought her to one of fame's most elevated levels. The great works she has produced are familiar to us. Her history we should not be so well acquainted with (for it belongs to a country far distant from us in every respect) had not some of its best-known representatives made it their business to disclose it to us in its most intimate detail. Two members of that group of the "Five" who, though they now all have disappeared from life's stage, still remains the one most representative of the symphonic and lyric genius of Russia, César Cui and Rimsky-Korsakow in turn, and at widely separated intervals, have informed us with regard to its aspirations, efforts and, finally, its realizations. It is now more than forty years ago that the first-named composer published his study on *La Musique en Russie*, in France (Paris, 1880), telling the story of the appearance on the scene of the new school; and quite recently we have been able to read the book of reminiscences entitled *Ma vie musicale*, left by Rimsky-Korsakow, in which the whole history of the period during which an evolution of such great interest transpired has been retraced. Finally, letters of Borodine's have been published which, since they were not intended for publication, are the more interesting because of the fact, as they supply valuable details regarding the artists' private life.

The times have run their course: the book is closed, the thread cut. In the midst of the upheaval which has so profoundly disturbed the social life of Russia, the future opening-up to art in this great country is still unknown. The majority of Russian musicians have left their native land; they are living in exile, and do not feel themselves impelled to produce new works. As to those who have remained, all their energies are confined to giving auditions, performances which eventuate under more or

less precarious conditions, of the approved works of the former repertory. And in the first rank of these works are those proceeding out of the national movement represented by the group already mentioned. It seems as though this might be a propitious time for casting a summary glance over the history of this group, summing up what has been told us by those among its representatives best qualified to speak.

However, their coming forward had not been awaited in France in order to awaken an interest in Russian music. It was thus that as early as 1845, Hector Berlioz, the master best fitted to appreciate at their true value works of a lofty and novel trend, dedicated an acutely written study to Michael Glinka, some of whose things he had produced in his own concerts. Subsequently he himself went to Russia, on two different occasions, and for all that he had undertaken these expeditions for the purpose of carrying on a propaganda for his own works, he did not fail to interest himself in the developments of an art of recent creation and, reciprocally, took pains to make it known in occidental Europe. It is most unjust of Rimsky-Korsakow to reproach him for not devoting attention to the young Russian school during his last trip. It was in 1868 that Berlioz paid his last visit to Russia; he was very ill, worn out by the strenuous life he had led, and he was soon to die. It would have been showing him but little charity to have insisted that under such circumstances he study these new works, then only in process of working-out, in a thorough-going way. As to Rimsky-Korsakow, he was just about twenty-four at the time; had as yet produced little or nothing, and people hardly knew as yet whether he was a musician or a sailor. But Berlioz had been in touch with his friends, and his relations with them were most cordial; the letters he wrote on his return to the friends he had left in Russia, and which are among the last of his correspondence preserved, mention César Cui and Balakirew several times, and express his regret that they are not near him. "I know that I am going to die . . . I would like to see you; perhaps you would wind up the springs again, Cui, and would revivify my blood." These are the sentiments he expresses in a letter of August 21, 1868, the last letter of his which has been printed to date.

The two names we have just mentioned are, in fact, those of the two composers, the serious among the "Five," to whom the credit of the first initiative in the new movement belongs. And this initiative, at the date we have reached, was no longer so very recent, for those who had taken it had no more than outgrown

their childhood at the moment when they met for the first time. This is how César Cui recalls the event:

In 1856, two musicians, very young, and passionately devoted to their art, met in St. Petersburg. The capital of Russia being the principal musical centre of the country, they made it their permanent place of residence. One was Balakirew, the other the writer of these pages. Some time after, Rimsky-Korsakow, Borodine and Moussorgsky joined them and, little by little, a small circle of friends was formed, which had been brought together by one and the same love for musical art. . .

The activity of this youthful group was immediate and incessant, though individually they were all professionally engaged to an extent which seemed to relegate them, as musicians, to the ranks of the amateurs. Balakirew, the oldest among them, did not long delay in devoting himself entirely to the art of music, though he had taken a scientific course in a university in his youth. But César Cui was an engineer officer and became a general; Moussorgsky was a functionary in the War Department, Borodine a professor of chemistry in a medical college, and Rimsky-Korsakow was a sailor. Nevertheless, all of them became masters, and it was as musicians that they gained fame.

César Cui, after reviewing the outstanding facts of the preceding period, the work of Michael Glinka, the founder of Russian music; then that of Serov and Dargomijsky, the intermediaries; then the patriotic composers and the new-comers, in the study which we have already mentioned, supplied the first valuable indications regarding the beginning activity of the young school. Yet, writing so soon, he could not give a complete idea of the subject: it is Rimsky-Korsakow's book which presents a really collective picture.

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What is primarily interesting about this book is the fact that it allows us to penetrate into the vital intimacy of a collectivity of art, an intimacy so close that it reacted even on the output of the works. And these last respond so perfectly to an ideal held in common, that one cannot always tell which one of the "Five" may have contributed the major portion of labor in a work bearing a single signature. There is hardly one work of Moussorgsky's, of César Cui's, of Borodine's and—at the beginning—of Rimsky-Korsakow's which, to a greater or lesser extent, did not represent the collaboration, in first instance, of Balakirew, their dean and

recognized leader, and then, as circumstances might dictate, sometimes that of one, sometimes that of another.

Examples which prove this abound. On the very first page of Rimsky-Korsakow's memoirs, we see Balakirew, to whom young Rimsky comes to submit his first efforts, busy orchestrating the overture of the *Prisonnier du Caucase*, an opera by César Cui. The young neophyte ambitiously desires to make his bow with a symphony, and has brought along his sketch. And Balakirew orchestrates the first movement on the spot, in order to show the new disciple how it should be done. At the same time he submits his own works to the judgment of his young friends: nothing came from the pen of one of the "Five" that was not at once submitted to the examination of the rest, among whom Balakirew's voice preponderated since, being the oldest (was he not all of twenty-five at the time when Rimsky-Korsakow placed himself under his wing!), he exercised on the others the prestige of an undisputed mastery.

He was obeyed blindly, for his ascendancy was great. Young, with handsome eyes, bright and full of life, a luxuriant beard, speaking with authority and frankness, ready to improvise at a moment's notice, repeating without a single mistake any composition once played for him, he had an ascendancy which none other could gain. . . . Despotic, he insisted that a work should be revised following the very letter of his indications. In fact, more than once, one could discover entire passages of his own in the works of the others.

In one of his own compositions Rimsky-Korsakow has given an example of this coöperation by means of which the master and his disciples corrected each other, rectifying errors which were a natural result of their respective individual deficiencies, and each supplying what the other lacked.

I had, (so he tells us with no attempt at concealment), composed a song to words by Heine. . . . Balakirew was well enough satisfied with it, but finding that the piano accompaniment was inadequate, which was quite natural in my case, since I was no pianist, he rewrote the piano part completely. And it was with his piano accompaniment that my song was eventually published.

Before long it was Rimsky's turn to assist in the collective production and none gave himself up to the task with greater activity than he did. Is it generally known that a large part of the output of the gifted Moussorgsky was simply written by Rimsky-Korsakow? His *Vie musicale* abounds in instances of this sort, and the others have done their share as well. We may follow their collaboration from page to page.

First of all there is a "Scherzo," and a chorus from *Oedipus*, which Rubinstein had included on the program of one of his concerts. They did not sound at all badly, because "these compositions had gone through Balakirew's hands."

The orchestral prelude to the *Chauve journée en Ukraine* preceded the opera *La Foire de Sorotchinetz*. This prelude was composed and orchestrated by Moussorgsky himself, and I still have his own score. It was, later, put into shape by Liadow. The detached numbers from *La Khovanstchina*, which were played at the second concert (of the Free Music School, under Rimsky-Korsakow's direction), were not all orchestrated by Moussorgsky. . . . The "Persian Dance" was orchestrated by me. Though he had promised this number for the concert, Moussorgsky delayed handing it over, and when I proposed to orchestrate it for him, he agreed no sooner had I spoken, and appeared very well satisfied with my work, for all that I had introduced a number of changes in his harmonies.

There was even more done in this way after Moussorgsky died. In fact, among the inextricable confusion of sketches found among his belongings there was, properly speaking, hardly anything which might be termed finished or completed. Pages differing in the most radical manner were discovered among these manuscripts, and it was often quite impossible to distinguish the compositions which had been partially set down from each other—to say nothing of those cases in which survivors recalled hearing the composer play pieces that were entirely complete, and which they had admired when they grew beneath his fingers on the keyboard, but of which not a trace remained in the shape of written notes.

Among the works which Moussorgsky had planned and which were never completed was a *Salammbô*, whose sketches were a mine from which the composer drew material with which to build several other works: matter taken from this source has been discovered even in the most inspired pages of *Boris Godounov*.

"After his death," says Rimsky-Korsakow, "all his manuscripts were handed over to me to arrange and order, to complete the works which had been commenced and to prepare them for publication." With entire disinterestedness the composer of so many original, living works consented to undertake this long, arduous task, without a thought of remuneration, either for Moussorgsky's heirs or for himself. This labor engaged Rimsky's time for two entire years, and came to a satisfactory end with the composition of an opera, *La Khovanstchina*, that of another, *La Foire de Sorotchinez*, choruses, orchestra compositions, etc.,

completed after note-sketches, and incomplete and unorchestrated manuscripts.

In *La Khovanstchina*, especially, there was much to rewrite and recompose; there were, for instance, unnecessary and repulsive sections in the first and second acts, which tended to make them too long; while the fifth act, on the contrary, was largely lacking, and what there was of it was sketched out only in the most superficial manner. The chorus of the Rascolniki, with the bell-effect before they mount the woodpile to be burned alive, had to be entirely rewritten, since it was quite impossible as it had been primarily written. As for the final chorus, it only existed in the shape of a melody, written out by Mme. Karmalina, and given by her to Moussorgsky. Utilizing this melody, I wrote the entire chorus, as well as the orchestral episode accompanying the scene of the burning at the stake. For a monologue in the fifth act I used music which I had taken from the first. The variations in Neapha's song, in the third act, were considerably modified and worked over by me.

La Nuit sur le Mont Chauve, a symphonic piece which has been played more than once in our Parisian concerts, has undergone the most extraordinary avatars, turn and turn about, at the hands of Moussorgsky and Rimsky-Korsakow. In the beginning it was a youthful composition of the first-mentioned composer, written in imitation of Liszt. Balakirew having criticized it severely, the composer had laid it aside. Deciding to appeal from the condemnation pronounced on it, he took it up again later on, introduced vocal parts, and a place was made for it in Rimsky's *Mlada*. But *Mlada* was in turn abandoned, and then the composition passed (still tentatively) into Moussorgsky's *La Foire de Sorstichinetz*, where it was to serve to accompany a fantastic dream. Thus this piece first took form as a solo for piano and orchestra, and in its second and third versions became a vocal composition without orchestra.

Since none of these variants could be played in public, (says Rimsky-Korsakow), I determined to write an instrumental piece with the material furnished by Moussorgsky, retaining all that was best and most unified in the composer's work, and avoiding, so far as possible, to add to it any conceptions of my own. The proper thing to do was to create a form in which Moussorgsky's ideas would be framed to the best advantage. The problem was a difficult one. . . .

It was in this way that Moussorgsky's music was written and to quote our author once more:

All these manuscripts were in a condition of the greatest disorder. Among them were the most absurd harmonies, monstrous passages of solfeggio, strikingly illogical modulations, instrumentations which had failed of success, orchestrated numbers all giving proof of the most

impudent amateurishness and an absolute technical impotence. In spite of all this, these productions in most cases showed such greatness of genius, such originality, and so novel a character, that their publication appeared to be indispensable. Nevertheless, they called for arrangement, for a coördination without which they could command no more than a biographical interest. In this way, Moussorgsky's works still will be able to exist in all their freshness half-a-century after his death. When they become public property, it will always be time enough to undertake this purely biographical edition, since I have handed over all manuscripts to the Imperial Public Library.

Even *Boris Godunov*, represented during the composer's lifetime, reflected the mutations undergone owing to these successive additions. Moussorgsky wrote his score himself, and his orchestration was conceived without brilliancy. There was, for instance, a Polonaise, brilliant as regards its musical style and its form; but whose instrumentation had been written, no doubt in the spirit of archaism, in the retrospective style of Lulli's *petits violons*. Rimsky-Korsakow invested it with a brilliant Wagnerian orchestration—so he informs us—and the effect of the piece was enhanced. And later he elaborates a complete new "edition" of *Boris Godunov*. In this new working-out the score was first executed at the Petrograd Conservatory, conducted by the "editor," and was then taken over and definitely placed in the Maryinsky Theatre.

I was beyond measure satisfied with my editing and orchestration of *Boris*, (wrote Rimsky-Korsakow), which I have heard for the first time with the accompaniment of a grand orchestra. Fervent admirers of Moussorgsky looked rather huffed and expressed vague regrets. Yet in subjecting *Boris* to a revision I did not suppress the original version. When the day comes that the original is found to be superior to my revision, it will only be necessary to present the work according to Moussorgsky's own score.

It is in this final form, however, in whose preparation Rimsky-Korsakow was associated, as we have just shown, that *Boris Godunov* has been performed wherever this fine work has been staged.

After Moussorgsky comes Borodine—who died even more prematurely, and without having completed his musical life-work. Even while still living, he had not disdained the aid of his friends. When, in the season of 1878-1879, Rimsky-Korsakow was entrusted with the directorship of the Petrograd School of Music, he announced on his program the first hearing of the dances from *Prince Igor*, in the belief that Borodine had completed the opera in question. But this was not the case. The orchestration was

lacking altogether, and, in fact, it was necessary for Rimsky-Korsakow and another friend, Liadow, to get to work and supply it. To their efforts is due the brilliant instrumentation of these dances, which have become so famous. On another occasion, Rimsky-Korsakow, disappointed at realizing that his friend Borodine, occupied by other matters, seemed to lack all initiative to proceed with the composition of "his best opera," offered to act as his musical secretary, and carried off with him to the country pages of sketches in order to put them in shape. Hence, when Borodine died, it was quite natural that Rimsky-Korsakow should undertake to gather and save for posterity such precious fragments as might be found. *Prince Igor*, notably, was far from having been completed. After mentioning those portions which Borodine had last written, Rimsky goes on to say:

Yet these pieces were still in the form of piano sketches; and, finally, the remainder were only present in the shape of incomplete and confused drafts, without saying anything of numerous gaps. Thus, there was no book for the second and third acts, not even a scenario; only here and there a few stanzas had been set down accompanied by chords, which, however, had no relation to each other. Fortunately, I remembered what these two acts should contain from conversations I had had with Borodine, even though he had not been altogether decided as regards his intentions. In the third act in particular the music was missing. It was understood, therefore, between Glazounow and myself, that he should compose all that was missing in the third act and, drawing on our memory, he would write the overture which the composer had often played for us. For my part, I was to look after the orchestration of the entire work, the composition of what was lacking and the coördination of the numbers left uncompleted by Borodine.

We may admire, in passing, the penetration of these geniuses who, under the impulse of their fraternal feelings, could thus supplement each other in the most natural way in the world, as well as the mnémonic fidelity which allowed his survivors to restore entire pages that the original composer had never set down on paper.

Hence, is it altogether fair to concede to the original composer the merit of having written a work so evidently collective, and should not Borodine's *Prince Igor* with quite as much justice bear the signature of Rimsky-Korsakow and Glazounow as well as his?

And it is not alone to his immediate contemporaries, to his comrades, that Rimsky-Korsakow rendered such good offices. We see him, in addition, busy revising the choruses of Glinka. He also orchestrated an opera by one of his predecessors, Dargomijsky,

Le Convive de pierre, which the composer had left simply in the shape of a vocal score. He even undertook this task twice, beginning it in his youth and resuming it later, in order to give the work of a colleague a definitive existence.

He was also accustomed in his own case to undertake such "remakings." *Pskovityanka*, his first opera, was written three times: on the first occasion with the exuberance and freshness of youthful imagination, but also with youth's lack of skill. The second time he rewrote it under the disillusionizing influence of his academic studies; the third time, finally, with the experience of an art which had come into its full heritage of development.

Sadko, the symphonic poem, was one of his earliest works. It was played in Paris (at the Concerts-Pasdeloup), when still a novelty, a long, long time ago. Later on the composer reshaped it, while still allowing it to retain its original form as an orchestral composition. At length, he did not shrink from composing a third *Sadko*, this time an opera, in which he employed all the thematic elements found in his preceding symphonic pages.

Antar is one of Rimsky-Korsakow's most perfected concert-pieces. Still he mentions it as being among his first attempts, dating back to a period when, as he himself avows, he hardly knew how to write. It must be that in this case, too, he gathered up his thematic elements and subjected them to a reconstructive process later on.

The other masters of the group, though they did not work so hard, acted in the same manner. Rimsky-Korsakow's *Vie Musicale* testifies to the fact that Moussorgsky, who left so many incomplete works at his death, himself subjected some of the works of others to this same process by which the musical material is taken up again, and reworked and reshaped in a thousand ways. Instances of his having done so are known.

It was because, at the time their group came into being, these musicians, so truly impulsive, with so fresh an ichor in their veins, and but newly entered upon a domain of art which also was practically a novelty in their country, had such confidence in their budding genius that they wished to write nothing but what was exclusively and directly dictated by it. The example of their predecessors only seemed to them calculated to modify their own personality: their aim was to stand on their own feet creatively. Yet they were not long in realizing that their improvisations would not withstand the test of time. Hence their perpetual hesitations, their continual reworking of compositions whose generative ideas remained vital, but whose uncertain

formal structure weakened their effect. They found it necessary, when experience had opened their eyes, to abate somewhat that sovereign contempt which they had flaunted for all that tended to be scholastic. Rimsky-Korsakow's example in this respect is most significant.

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He had entered Balakirew's group in 1861, when he was no more than seventeen years of age. At the time he was a student in the Naval school, and had taken a few piano lessons (he always regretted that they had been so few in number) and, purely by instinct, he had covered a few sheets of music-paper with his scribblings. This was the beginning and the end of his musical knowledge. He submitted a Nocturne and some symphonic fragments to Balakirew, and the latter at once told him that he would have to write his symphony in complete form. And in this manner, without even knowing what a chord of the seventh, a modulation, a development, a tie or a tone really was, the young man undertook to rival Beethoven.

The incidental works which they read among themselves and then criticized apart, were the only musical examples which the members of the group could follow. Their repertory was restricted and their opinions regarding the masters who had produced them were distinguished principally by their severity; Balakirew and Moussorgsky being the pianists of the group, they played transcriptions of the Schumann symphonies and the last quartets of Beethoven for four hands. As regards the last named composer his eight earlier symphonies were, in their judgment, only "middling successful;" their themes "were adjudged feeble." In fact, these "melodic creations" were but little relished by the group of young Russian musicians. Chopin's melodies appeared to them "mawkish and written for the ladies," and he himself was even termed "a neurotic worlding." Mendelssohn's compositions seemed "shrill and written to please the taste of small shopkeepers." Bach's fugues, nevertheless, were esteemed, according to one paragraph, while in another the composer of the "Passion" is called "petrified." Mozart and Haydn were regarded as "antiquated and naive." And, note the following affinity: "Berlioz, whose acquaintance they were just beginning to make, was highly appreciated," while Liszt was regarded as "musically corrupt and at times even caricaturistic." Wagner was hardly mentioned, according to the first chapter, but the fourth, recording

remembrances of the presentation of *Lohengrin* in Petrograd, says frankly: "Balakirew, Cui, Moussorgsky and myself were in a box with Dargomijsky. We expressed all our contempt for *Lohengrin*."

In fact, the only models which these new creators accepted were those which they offered one another, in the shape of their own compositions, as well as the works of their immediate predecessors in Russia, after Glinka. And they were not gentle, either, with those composers who did not belong to their own little group. (Lwov was accounted a nullity, Rubinstein without either talent or gift for composition; and, later, Tschaikowsky was only tolerated because of his amiable character, not at all because of his music). "His conservatorial education always raised a barrier between him and us," says our author. In brief, there never was a more narrow, more intolerant little group, a little circle more closely united; and yet one which has given an example of such power. And still, its surprising originality all resulted from its application of the principle to which it conformed with inexorable rigor: *Farà da se* (Act of your own volition).

Nevertheless, the moment could not fail to come when a spirit as judicious and well-balanced as that of Rimsky-Korsakow was obliged to admit that instinct, powerful though it might be, was not everything in art-creation; that mere practical development, swiftly degenerating into empiricism, does not suffice for the invention of the diverse and multiple forms without which the labor of art cannot renew itself; that, in a word, there is a minimum of technical knowledge, of professional knowledge, "which cannot be ignored if one wishes to write," and it is the following circumstances which opened his eyes to the fact.

In 1871, he was twenty-seven years of age, and was still a naval officer. He had composed and had presented his first opera, *Pskovityanka*, and his first symphonic poems, *Sadko* and *Antar*, which foretold the musician of the future, though they had not as yet spread his fame beyond the limits of a somewhat narrow circle, when he was given a great surprise. He was offered the post of professor of composition and instrumentation at the Petrograd Conservatory. Let us record the name of the unusual man who showed such unexpected confidence in a school which, not without reason, was reputed to be revolutionary, even anarchistic in its tendencies. He was called Azantchevsky, had just been appointed director of the Conservatory, and claimed that "he would vivify the waters which had grown stagnant."

This offer caused the scales to fall from Rimsky-Korsakow's eyes. Professor of composition, he, who had never even learned to compose! How then was he to teach composition to others? He hesitated. His friends encouraged him. They, who had always held themselves aloof from all that might be called "constituted authority," regarded this recognition of one of their number as an entering wedge for their party in the counsels of the government. Hence he accepted the position offered. Yet, honestly, he began with self-examination: "Although the composer of works which held their own and did not sound badly, and which had earned the approval of the public and of many musicians," he says, "I was only an amateur and knew nothing. I admit this openly before all."

It seems to me that this confession recalls another, that of Jean-Jacques Rousseau, admitting the gaps in his own musical education. He, too, has been freely accused of being an amateur. Will we be more indulgent in his case when it turns out that, later, a master of Rimsky-Korsakow's calibre says the identical thing about himself?¹

In order to make the necessary progress, the new-comer at the Conservatory acted in exactly the same way. "I learned music through teaching it," Rousseau had said; and it was through teaching composition that Rimsky-Korsakow found the way to a knowledge of its mechanism and its principles. With frank good humor he tells us that, at the commencement of his professorial career, the pupils who were more advanced in their studies quite unconsciously gave him his education; after which he felt himself able to instruct the others.

Yet it was a composer that he realized in an even greater degree the benefits of theoretic and professional instruction:

After I had composed *Pskovityanka*, (he concludes), the lack of harmonic technic caused my inspiration, which had at its disposal only the same worn processes, to come to a halt. It was only the development of technic, which I had set myself to studying, that made a renewal of my creative powers possible, by injecting them with a fresh current and reawakening the flow of my interior activity.

We have just quoted the case of Jean-Jacques Rousseau. The great minds of the French eighteenth century were endowed with a penetration, a power of apperception which led them, a

¹One might object that after having made his *début* with amateur works Rimsky-Korsakow, later on, showed great mastery; while Jean-Jacques Rousseau never rose above the level of the *Devin du Village*. Yet this was because instead of writing new scores, he gave the world *Emile*, *La Nouvelle Héloïse* and the *Contrat Social*. Had he continued to follow music, it is certain that he would have made the same progress.

century in advance, to discover truths which our contemporaries believe they themselves have been the first to note. Let us cite, as an example, what Rameau has written, in order to prove that genius must needs be fructified by art:

He whose taste has been formed merely by comparisons which are within the scope of his sensations, is able, at the most, to excel only in certain genres. When you take from him the characters to which he is accustomed, you will no longer recognize him. Since he draws all from his imagination, without the assistance of art in its relations to his expression, he wears out in the end. In the fire of his first efforts he is altogether brilliant, yet this fire consumes itself in measure as he attempts to revive it, and all that he has to offer are repetitions or platitudes.

"He wears out in the end." "His fire consumes itself. . . ." This is exactly what the Russian master, more than a century and a half after Rameau, observed in his own case.

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Rimsky-Korsakow's book is not merely the story of his own life. Just as a large part of his time, as we have seen, is devoted to completing and perfecting the works of his companions, so his memoirs are the history of the entire group of which he was a member: in them the figures of his friends live again, traced in truly striking relief.

One of the most curious is that of Borodine. Some ten years older than Rimsky-Korsakow, he nevertheless took up his musical career at a later period, and joined that group which an irony, perhaps not barren of result, had named "the puissant band." In this group, hardly a member of which was exclusively a professional musician, Borodine was the one who devoted the smallest portion of his time to the art. Professor of chemistry at the School of Medicine, he declared that he loved science quite as much as he did music. And yet it was neither his laboratory nor his academic chair which preoccupied his attention, for the major portion of his time was given up to philanthropic and charitable works, to which he devoted himself with ardor. A strange physiognomy, a strange life was that of this man, endowed with real musical genius, busied at the same time with scientific research, and who, meanwhile, impelled by a spirit of love and self-sacrifice, led the life of an apostle, wellnigh that of an anchorite. He is worthy of a place in the gallery of characters created by Tolstoi, who are contented only in the fulness of true and absolute

renunciation of self. We can see him, as witnessed by Rimsky-Korsakow, consecrating himself, body and soul, to those works of social regeneration which Russia saw spring up in great number during the closing years of the nineteenth century. He had been one of the organizers of the Women's School of Medicine, and was a member of all sorts of charitable organizations and societies for the encouragement of studious youth, of female students in particular. One of these organizations, for which he acted as treasurer, deprived him of a great part of his time. Society ladies, while displaying a great deal of enthusiasm for his musical gifts, took advantage of his unsophisticated character to induce him to sit on welfare committees, robbing him of all the time he might have devoted to composition. At the same time he was given over to the assaults of the Russian students, who, knowing him to be a feminist, too often abused his kindness. His wife, though ill, identified herself with his efforts. They adopted children and brought them up; often the parents came to see them and had to be taken in over night; they were accommodated with divans, and even slept on the ground floor, and the professor's apartment situated on the ground-floor of the School of Medicine itself, was thus transformed into a species of asylum.

As to the current obligations of life, they were the least of Borodine's worries. His inconsequence made his friends smile and might often have enriched a monograph—it has already been well-written elsewhere—with piquant details regarding "The absent-minded one." In summer he took his vacation, which he passed in the country, in the middle of Russia. This should have been the favorable season for his medical work, but was nothing of the sort. He usually installed himself in a vast, but poorly furnished and uncomfortable *izba*, and there he lived a regular peasant's life; his wife going out bare-foot. Thus the summer went by for them, in the midst of privation and inactivity, and without profit to art. Borodine died prematurely, having practically spoiled his musical career, and we have already seen what would have happened to his work had Rimsky-Korsakow not been there to complete and perfect it. It would have perished, practically in its entirety. And yet, what lofty, vibrant and delightful musical qualities it evinces.

The figure of Moussorgsky, as traced by the pen of Rimsky-Korsakow, is no less characteristic. The composer of *Boris Godonov* had been an officer in the Guards, and had then become an employee in an administrative bureau. He was a good pianist and had a pleasant baritone voice: at the meetings of the group, when the

young masters let their friends hear their new compositions, it was Moussorgsky who sang the grand rôles from *Ivan le terrible*, *Pskovityanka*, César Cui's operas and his own *Boris*. None had so deliberately ignored the technic of composition as Moussorgsky; hence he assumed an attitude not alone contemptuous, but actually gloried in his ignorance. He led the life of a Bohemian—a Bohemian of Petrograd, a type quite as strange in another way as that of Montmartre or the Italian Quarter of Paris. His friends at times found it difficult to take him seriously. "His brain is feeble—he has no head," Balakirew said of him. His excentricities increased in number when, after the performance of his opera, he gave up the *bourgeois* duties to which he had hitherto owed his existence, in order to play the artist. He joined a woman singer in order to offer a course in music, in which he confined himself entirely to the part of accompanist; at times he appeared in order to play the strangest possible repertory of transcriptions, improvisations and fantasies. Then, his mind unbalanced by his success, he broke with his old friends, and sought the company of the self-styled admirers who surrounded him in the nocturnal cabarets of Petrograd. He took to drink, became a confirmed alcoholic and died in an access of *delirium tremens*. We have seen his portrait, his hairy figure, with bushy locks and protruberant forehead, giving his features a certain resemblance to those of Verlaine. Was there not a spiritual analogy between them as well? Older in years than the poet, he seems to be a personage in some romantic drama of the boulevards, one which the pen of Frédéric Lemaitre might have portrayed with realistic power: "Genius and Disorder!" That he had genius is not to be contested, the genius which comes from the soul, which is most intense and most human.

César Cui, one of the elders of the group, played a specially defined part in it; he was regarded as a lyricist, devoted to vocal music; while the others, on the contrary, were symphonists. Rimsky-Korsakow points out an "Auberian thread" in his music, whose presence he explains by the composer's semi-French origin. The fact is that he followed a road which diverged notably from that taken by his colleagues. In the earlier period of their relations with each other, Rimsky-Korsakow was aware that he lived in the finer section of the town, keeping a boarding-school where boys were prepared for a military career, for Cui was a professor of fortification. Yet he found time to devote a large portion of his activity to music. Less of a symphonist than the other representatives of the group, he composed operas, above all *Le*

Prisonnier du Caucase, a Russian subject, and *William Ratcliffe*, as well as others in which, as the result of a marked preference, he had recourse to French subjects: *Angelo*, after Victor Hugo's drama; *Le Flibustier*, whose music he wrote to M. Jean Richepin's verses; and even *Mademoiselle Fifi*, after Guy de Maupassant's story. He also, to the very last, was active as a musical critic, writing for leading Russian papers, and we already know that he has written for French readers an account of the history of music in his own land. One of the oldest members of the group of the "Five," he was also its last survivor, and it is only quite recently that we were advised of his death, which occurred after the Revolution had begun and Russia was isolated from the rest of the world. If he had survived to the present day he would be the dean of European composers, M. Saint-Saëns, who holds the present rights to that title, having been born the same year (1835), but several months later. Yet it was not given Cui to hold his prerogative to the end.

As to Balakirew, we already know that at the beginning of this musical movement he played the part of the head of the school. He had been started on his career by Glinka, and was the only professional musician of the group. He played piano well and, from the very beginning of his professional activities, had conducted a private orchestra in an artistic home, circumstances which greatly favored his aptitudes for critical observation, and gave him, at the onset, that practice in musicianship which no study of the musical theory and method had given him, seeing that he had never studied these subjects. He was, says Rimsky-Korsakow, "endowed with innate instinct for harmony and polyphony; and he possessed the technic of composition, partly as a natural gift, partly as the acquisition of personal experience. He commanded both the science of counterpoint and that of orchestration, and had a feeling for form, in a word, all that the composer must have." All this he had acquired without a teacher, through the sole power of his critical acumen; and it was because of these natural acquirements that he in turn was acclaimed the master. He was touchy and suspicious with respect to his former companions and disciples, and once they had attained their full development after following his guidance, he could not guard against the intrusion of that evil feeling which it is hard to qualify by any other name than that of jealousy. Rimsky-Korsakow in his own person made this unpleasant experience. When the time of maturity had come to all of them, when each was ready to take his own road, and still younger disciples were joining them,

Balakirew would still have liked to have kept them beneath the shadow of his paternal wing. Yet each took flight in one or another direction, and once more reunited, they grouped themselves under another patronage—that of the Russian Maceanas Belaiev. “A new season, new birds, new songs,” says Rimsky-Korsakow, philosophically. But Balakirew looked on this desertion as a kind of treason; he retired to his tent, and toward Belaiev, who had swallowed up his former circle, he showed the frankest animosity.

Rimsky-Korsakow, who had become the outstanding musical leader of the new group, kept in touch, at least professionally, with his former chief; yet this artificial understanding could not well last. It was true that the Russian school of 1890 already was no longer that of 1860-1870. The latter had been more primitive, more natural, more pronouncedly Russian in character; it had profited by the strength of harshness, it had known the advantages of intolerance. The second group had grown more cosmopolitan. In it what might be called the savagery of the primitive period had been succeeded by something more polished, nearer civilization, more universal and also more prolific.

We should note that in the interim between these two epochs the original principle has not changed: forms alone have been modified, have grown more polished from one generation to another. The proof of this is that if the representative type of the first period is Balakirew, Rimsky-Korsakow is the incarnation of the second; and he is connected in a sufficiently intimate manner with his precursors. Yet the evolution had been accomplished and it could not well take place without breaking some ties. Hence the attitude of the two masters as regards each other was necessarily fatal, and the sequence of events which developed between them have almost a symbolic meaning. Both of them officially entrusted with the duties of conductors of the Imperial orchestra, they had, to all appearances, remained on a friendly footing with each other. The day might have dawned which would have seen them once more united in cordial friendship; yet the exact opposite took place. On the occasion of the twenty-fifth anniversary of the beginning of Rimsky-Korsakow's career, the Russian musical world wished to celebrate the event. Did Balakirew ask himself why the twenty-fifth anniversary of his own *début* had not been the occasion of a celebration? One cannot say, but it is possible. At any rate, Balakirew officially presented the compliments of the Imperial orchestra to his former disciple; but his felicitations did not come from the heart. The

very first pretext, the self-same day, was seized upon to furnish the subject of a discussion which degenerated into a quarrel, in consequence of which their rupture became definite. Those who know the Russians, and who are acquainted with their susceptibility and their suspicious character, will not be surprised at this disagreement between two masters who had become rivals, two veterans of the vanguard whom one should have liked to have seen, on such a day, enjoying the fruit of their common labors side by side.

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As to Rimsky-Korsakow, his autobiography, which makes him so directly acquainted with his readers, presents him in a most favorable light. "I have finished the tale of my musical life," he says, in concluding it. "It is confused, it is not well-written as regards style, it is often quite dry; on the other hand, it contains *nothing but the truth*, and therein lies its interest." We feel that this final impression is entirely accurate and sincere. Those who were privileged to know Rimsky-Korsakow ever so slightly will have been able to realize at once that they had to do with a personality in whom uprightness and frankness were leading virtues. The perusal of his memoirs can only strengthen this impression.

In his recollections we are able to follow the Russian master step by step through all the circumstances of his life as a musician, from the day of his first interview with Balakirew, César Cui and Moussorgsky, in 1861, up to the close of the year 1906, less than two years before his death. He does not speak of much save his art, which, evidently was his exclusive preoccupation. Toward the close of a single chapter, in a few words, he touches lightly on his ideas regarding the Beyond, and these thoughts are devoid of all mysticism, even of spiritualism in its most elementary form. All in all, the artist appears to us as though imbued with the spirit of rationalism to a preponderating degree. He informs us that one day he made up his mind to solve the enigma of philosophy and esthetics, and that for this purpose he attended lectures and took notes which were to supply material for a book he intended to write. And he turned these ideas destined to formulate theories of the greatest profundity over in his brain until it made him ill. He feared that he would have a brain storm, lost his appetite, and was obliged to stop. He resumed his task on two different occasions, and in each case the same symptoms

reappeared. Unquestionably Rimsky-Korsakow was not meant to be a philosopher: he abandoned his transcendent speculations, once more began to write music and all was for the best.

This was because he was far more the man of action than the thinker: active, decided, energetic, gifted with clear insight. The part he played in the evolution of Russian art is indubitable that of a leader, one who knows how to command. He was placed in turn at the head of various important institutions, which prospered under his direction.

Toward the end of his life, he was drawn into the vortex of events which, although they were localized in his account within the bounds of the world of music, were nevertheless, closely connected with the annunciatory movements heralding the terrible upheavals which were to follow. In 1905, the youth of the universities rose in revolt: the pupils at the Imperial Conservatory followed its example. Rimsky-Korsakow, the professor of the highest class, aligned himself with the young folk, and took his stand beside them. He was dismissed. The disorders increased. In the autumn came those historic days, and the general strike of six million workmen which brought the national life of Russia to a standstill for twenty-seven days. These events had their repercussion in every strata of society. The Conservatory was reorganized, following the meetings of committees—veritable Soviets before the fact—in which, during stormy sessions, Rimsky-Korsakow took a daring part. Death prevented his taking part in other and even graver events, of which those in which he had shared as a witness, and in some sort, as a participant, were certainly the preliminaries.

More than one detail in his book gives us information regarding the state of Russian society at a time when the illusion of its power was still widely impressed upon the world. His struggles with the Imperial censorship are interesting. It seemed at first as though he would not be able to have his *Pskovityanka* performed, since the Tzar Ivan was one of the characters, and an old imperial ukase—which, however, authorized the appearance of the ancient tzars on the dramatic stage, provided they belonged to dynasties anteceding the Romanoffs—forbade their appearance in opera. Why this distinction? "Because," the composer was told, "it would hardly be proper to see a tzar sing a chansonette." Yet, under certain forms of government, favor will accomplish much. Rimsky-Korsakow took advantage of a favorable opportunity to induce a grand-duke to take steps to intervene with the emperor, and the authorization was given.

Later, the same thing happened again, in the case of another score, though the affair ended in a different manner: "A Christmas Night" (*Une Nuit de Noël*). The poem, borrowed from Gogol, had a part for a tzarina, who, for all that her name was not mentioned, and though the characters in the drama were all imaginary, was recognizable as the Empress Catherine the Great. Relying on precedent furnished by the performance of *Pskovityanka* and having received a formal authorization, both composer and manager thought they could present the opera without danger; but on this occasion it was the grand-dukes who grew indignant. The emperor, who had already given his consent, withdrew it after he had listened to them, and forbade the performance. There was only one thing left to do, and that was to change the empress of Russia into an imaginary character, a symbolic figure—and make her a man! It is an example of the bungling, the arbitrariness, the self-contradiction which were the rule under a government at once despotic and feeble, and which, displayed on a greater and vaster scale, were bound to have those consequences which are only too well known to history.

To return to more purely musical considerations, we call attention, without more than mention, to some interesting pages in Rimsky-Korsakow's book, regarding the use made of the popular melody, the folk-tune, in art-works and the legitimacy of so doing. It is well known what use the Russian school has made of this material, which is the common property of the national genius, and to what degree it has been revitalized thereby.

We instance, without adding a single word of commentary, the following definition: "Wagner's leading motive, recalling violent military signals . . ." There is also this appreciation, which the author lets fall in passing: ". . . the trend toward decadence, *which came to us from the occident!*"

We recall that, during the year which preceded his death, Rimsky-Korsakow having come to Paris, was invited to hear *Pélleas et Mélisande*. Surrounded by admirers who awaited his judgment with anxiety, he could not help declaring, with his customary frankness, that he did not understand a bit of it. We may recall this judgment as a supplement to what he says in his memoirs, which he had ceased to edit some months anterior to the time when it was spoken.

Finally, the book stops, from page to page, at each of those works which, all of them together, make up their composer's musical baggage, and here we find that Rimsky-Korsakow has made confessions which are precious. He quite simply tells us

what he has done, and what his intentions were in so doing. To-day we are familiar with his orchestral music, so picturesque, so vital, so rich in dazzling color, and two of his operas have been heard in Paris; this is enough to allow us to understand by means of analogy his explanations regarding his other works with which we are unacquainted.

What stands out first of all, when we consider them as a whole, is their composer's almost total preoccupation, altogether spontaneous, however, with the creation of art-works which would be exclusively national in character. Practically every subject he treats is drawn from Russian legend, history or life. Once, and once only did he accept a Roman subject, *Servilia*, and he was greatly taken up with his thoughts as to the musical color which it would be proper to give this work. He also wrote a Polish opera, *Pan Voyevoda*, drawing his inspiration from folk-songs to whose sound he had been rocked in the cradle, and finding an echo for them in his Slavic soul. As to *Mozart et Salieri*, with a subject taken from a musical anecdote, this little score does not occupy an important place among his works; incidentally, its moral is pointed by Pouchkine, so it is, after all, sufficiently Russian.

But *Pskovityanka*, with which he made his *début*, is truly and broadly a national drama. Its hero is Ivan the Terrible; the score is traversed by scenes from the life of the people, living and colorful, and the composer, not without pride, speaks of the impression produced on the student youth of Russia by his "Songs of the Liberators."

Sadko, a subject dear to his heart, is, because of its poem, one of the most characteristic emanations of the Russian spirit and soul. Rimsky, in order to interpret it, created the new form of "the legendary recitative," without doubt an imitation of the *melopœia* upon which the folk-minstrels recited their ancient *bylines*.

There is, above all, one group of works at which he pauses with satisfaction. It is that which represents the expression of a naturalism in which the Russian soul lives again in all its spontaneity.

The first of these is the "Night in May," in which the musician gives free rein to his love for the poesy of the ancient sun-cult, "whose traditions have survived in the masses of the populace by reason of the songs and ritual games unconsciously tolerated and maintained by Christianity." Our author adds, "In fact, the last vestiges of these ancient songs seem to be disappearing, and

with them all the godheads of the ancient pantheon." Thus it is in Russia as in France, where analogous traditions of the early ages disappear from year to year.

Then comes *Sniegurotschka*, this score whose poesy is so vernal, which he composed in the course of a few summer weeks, in the country, and which seemed to him to have been dictated by "virgin nature" in whose midst he was living, among the forests, the meadows, the fields, the riverbanks, the villages with their old Russian names, the birds and flowers.

Mlada is a fantasy more exterior in its nature. The composer has sought to find for it effects of sonority as yet unheard, as, for example, when he introduces the Pandean pipes he had noticed the Gypsies use at the Paris Exposition in 1889, in the orchestra.

"Christmas Night," finally, is again inspired by the myths of solar adoration, and by the composers' leaning toward "the gods and demons of Slavic mythology." In this score he has the *koliada* sung, those venerable mendicant chants associated with the traditions of the festival of the winter solstice in Russia.

In this same national, thoroughly Slavic vein, the major portion of the works which bring Rimsky-Korsakow's active and prolific career to an end are also conceived. We have *Vera Scheloga*, a prelude written for *Pskovityanka* after the completion of that score; *Tsarsky Nievesta* (The Tzar's Bride), *Tzar Saltan*, *Pan Voyevode*, "Kastchei the Immortal," "The Invisible City of Kitezh," and a concluding work, *Le Coq d'Or*, shortly after whose completion he died. It is not mentioned in his memoirs because it was written after their completion: the last line in *Ma vie musicale* is dated August 22, 1906, while the score of the *Coq d'Or* is preceded by a preface written in 1907, and Rimsky-Korsakow died in 1908. Yet this very preface fills in the gap thus left in the volume, since it clearly expresses the intentions of the two authors, the poet and the musician. The former, whose labor represented an adaptation of Poushkine, while admitting that the legend he had developed was of oriental origin, none the less places its scene of action "among the Russian people, with all the strong, crude coloring, exuberance and freedom dear to the poet's heart." Rimsky-Korsakow, for his part, wishing to end his life with a statement doing honor to his art, upholds the rights of music and—without dwelling on principles which he had already often advanced on other occasions, regarding the subordination of music to the drama—firmly asserts: "An opera, first of all, is a musical work!"

All these works he handles in the freeest and most diversified musical styles, without restricting himself to any one sole determined form; at times taking up again and continuing the tradition of Glinka, at others having recourse to Wagnerian procedure, orchestrally and by use of the leading motive. There are occasions when he does not even blush to fall back upon the operatic style, giving the voices first place, "but not in the accidental, only momentarily connected fashion of making one voice follow after another, as has been suggested by the modern exigencies of so-called dramatic verity, according to which two or more persons must not speak at the same time," but by writing perfectly regular *ensembles*, and, in the end, often assigning the most important part to the symphonic instruments. His individual genius lent this diversified work perfect unity. The mere continuity of effect in such a score as *Le Coq d'Or* would suffice to fill us with respect for the upright and industrious man who produced it, even if the artist, at the same time, had not created a collective output of living art-works, representative among those of their period, and in themselves worthy of admiration. They worthily crown the collective work of this group of artists of a new generation, young and ardent and who, with an activity as great as their patience, and with a conquering spirit of originality, have erected an absolutely novel monument of art. What they did was to place under the harrow a plot of virgin soil, and draw from it wealth which, as we have already seen, in no wise yields to that brought forth by the nations musically most gifted, and subsisting on the traditions of a centuried past.

(Translated by Frederick H. Martens.)